

be completely successful. Mr. Piston, being an outstanding composer, an excellent musician, and a professor at Harvard University, has special qualifications to meet the demand. Actual music is again brought to bear on every point, the illustrations are most carefully chosen, the assignments, though not completely adequate, do, in the earlier chapters suggest to the teacher a method of writing which, if expanded, would be exceedingly stimulating to student progress. Indeed, this volume is a manual for the teacher more than for the student. Its organization implies a great deal of work, especially in analysis, that is not actually presented. No student could possibly cope with the chapter on modulation so soon in a college course unless considerable time had been given to the study of more simple musical organization. Yet two excellent chapters on *Harmonic Rhythm* and the *Harmonic Basis of the Phrase*, suggest concisely the direction that the earlier study should take.

Musicians will of course find themselves disagreeing with Mr. Piston over this or that. One may feel that the chapter on cadence comes surprisingly late in the volume, or that the first inversion chord is not treated with the same clarity that

is shed on the six-four chord. It would be impossible to write a text book on elementary harmony that would satisfy all musicians. This reviewer, for instance, cannot accept the argument concerning the augmented sixth chord, for it seems to him essential that this, also, be related to the tonal concept; historical argument cannot prevent him from hearing the chord as an incomplete dominant, the third having the characteristics of the lowered second step of the scale just as the root has of the leading tone. But disagreement with detail does not detract from the validity and effectiveness of Piston's presentation. This introduction to elementary harmony preserves a sane balance. Throughout, the student is made to feel the purpose of the work he is doing — to relate the theoretical task to music as a whole. Mr. Piston makes clear his purpose: "The function of a harmony exercise is to clarify principles by practical experience with the material. The attempt to go over the same ground, to solve the same problems as the composer, will afford, as no purely analytical process can, an insight into the nature and details of these problems and into the manner and variation of their solution."

Ross Lee Finney

## COMPOSERS BY THE ALPHABET

AS AN introduction to contemporary composers and their music for readers who are not familiar with the subject, *Great Modern Composers*, edited by Oscar Thompson, written by many different critics and published this October by Dodd, Mead and Company, is not of much value. Still less is it of value to those who already know something

of the subject and want to know more. A selection of biographical and critical articles on thirty-three composers, partly drawn from the *International Cyclopaedia of Music and Musicians* and partly written for the occasion, this compendium is a welter of as many divergent points of view as there are contributing authors. Few of the authors attempt the kind of

objective treatment usually expected in encyclopedic articles and this objectivity is the only thing which might have given the book some kind of unity. The contrast (among many others) between Olin Downes' familiar Sibelius steam and Nicolas Slonimsky's quantitative, fact-for-fact's-sake calibration of Villa-Lobos suggests that the reader of the book might be more bewildered by it than by hearing the music of which it speaks.

The choice of writers, apparently made by Mr. Thompson, for these articles is hard to understand. Some, as Gilbert Chase on Milhaud and Honegger, or as Oscar Thompson himself on Harris and Copland, seem too uninterested in their subjects to bother giving much information and too unfamiliar to risk any serious critical estimate. Others, like

Paul Stefan, Guido Gatti, and Edward Dent, by contrast, exhibit such familiarity with the subject and such understanding of the cultural backgrounds, that they puff their composers to an importance which, I am sure, in some cases they themselves would feel unjustified in the larger context of the book.

Anyway most of the better articles are condensations of more complete writings by the same authors on the same subjects and much of the rest of the book is flimsy and shallow. At the beginning of each is a biography of the composer and at the end, a list of his works. Milhaud's list omits among other pieces his film-music, his theatre music, *Songes*, *Médée*, *La mort d'un tyran*, *Pan et syrinx*. The other lists attempt to be a little more scholarly.

*Elliott Carter*